Chase What Matters
By Yu May

Chapter 1: The Weight of Choices

The old farmhouse creaked under the weight of the storm outside, its wooden beams groaning as rain lashed against the windows. Inside, the air was thick with tension, the kind that settles when words have been said and cannot be taken back. Chase stood in the center of the room, her hands clenched at her sides, her chest rising and falling with the effort of holding back tears. Her father, Thomas, loomed before her, his face a mask of disappointment and frustration.

"Chase," he began, his voice low but firm, "do you understand why I'm upset?"

She nodded, her gaze fixed on the worn rug beneath her feet. She knew why. She had known the moment she'd taken the horse out in the middle of the storm, risking not only her own safety but the animal's as well. It had been reckless, impulsive, and entirely her fault. But admitting it out loud felt like swallowing glass.

"I asked you a question," Thomas said, his tone sharper now. "Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir," she whispered, her voice barely audible over the rain.

Thomas sighed, running a hand through his graying hair. He was a man of few words, but when he spoke, his words carried weight. "You're not a child anymore, Chase. You're sixteen. Old enough to know better. Old enough to face the consequences of your actions."

Chase's stomach churned. She knew what was coming. It wasn't the first time she'd pushed the boundaries, but it was the first time she'd truly scared him. She could see it in his eyes—the fear that had flickered there when he'd found her soaked and shivering in the barn, the horse trembling beside her.

"Come here," he said, his voice softer now but no less commanding.

She hesitated, her feet rooted to the spot. The room felt smaller suddenly, the walls closing in around her. But she knew better than to disobey. Slowly, she stepped forward, her heart pounding in her chest.

Thomas sat down on the edge of the wooden chair by the fireplace, his expression unreadable. "This isn't easy for me," he said, his voice tinged with regret. "But I need you to understand that actions have consequences. You can't keep acting like the rules don't apply to you."

Chase bit her lip, her eyes stinging with unshed tears. She wanted to argue, to tell him that she hadn't meant to scare him, that she'd only wanted to prove she could handle the storm. But the words stuck in her throat. As she lay across her father's lap, Chase felt the denim of her overalls

straining taught against her upturned backside. She knew from experience, they would not cushion a spanking nearly enough to stop her from crying, sooner or later. It was only a matter of time.

When the moment came, it was swift and deliberate. Thomas's hand landed with a sharp crack, the sound echoing in the quiet room. Chase flinched, her breath catching in her throat. It wasn't the pain that stung the most—it was the weight of his disappointment, the knowledge that she'd let him down.

The first strike landed—firm, deliberate—and Chase gasped at the sudden heat blooming across her backside. She squeezed her eyes shut, her fingers twisting around the legs of the wooden chair. It wasn't the pain that stung the most—it was the weight of his disappointment, the knowledge that she'd let him down.

Another swat fell, then another, each one measured and unhurried. The rhythmic sound of palm meeting fabric filled the quiet room, punctuated only by Chase's shaky breaths. The warmth spread, sharpening into a deeper sting, and she bit down on her lip to keep from crying out.

"You know better." Thomas's voice was low, steady. "That storm could've taken you both."

Chase swallowed hard. She had known better. But the wild thrill of the wind in her hair, the way the horse had surged beneath her as lightning split the sky—it had all felt worth the risk. Until now.

Another smack landed, harder this time, and she jerked forward with a soft whimper. Her cheeks burned, and not just from the spanking. Shame curled hot in her chest.

"I trusted you," Thomas said, pausing. His hand rested lightly against her back, a silent reminder that he was still there. "You're smarter than this, Chase."

"I'm s-sorry," she choked out, the words thick with unshed tears.

The spanking resumed, each swat a firm reminder of the danger she'd courted. The fire crackled in the hearth, its warmth a stark contrast to the storm still rattling the windows. The scent of rain-damp wool and woodsmoke filled the air, grounding her even as her thoughts spun.

Tears pricked at her eyes, then spilled over. That was the worst part—he wasn't shouting. He wasn't even angry, not really. Just… disappointed. And that cut deeper than any punishment.

Chase wailed, tears and snot spilling freely down her face. “Aha! Daddy, I'm so, so sorry! Aaaah! Auuwaaah-haugh! Guh! Hoo…hoo…”

Thomas stopped. For a long moment, the only sound was the drumming rain outside, and Chase's broken sobs. Then his hand settled gently on her shoulder, turning her slightly to face him. His expression was stern but not unkind.

"I know you are," he said quietly. "But sorry isn't enough if you don't learn from it. If it ever happens again, you can expect another spanking, just like this one, and another one after that, just as hard."

Chase nodded, swiping at her eyes with the back of her hand. The sting lingered, but the heavy guilt in her chest was worse. She had scared him. She had been reckless. And that realization hurt more than any punishment ever could.

Thomas exhaled, pulling her into a rough hug. She stiffened at first, surprised by the gesture, but then she melted into it, burying her face in his shoulder, breathing in the familiar scent of hay.

For a moment, the world outside didn't matter. It was just the two of them, father and daughter, weathering the storm together. His arms tightened around her, solid and safe. "I'm not doing this to hurt you. I'm doing this because I love you. Because I need you to be safe. No more foolish risks."

He murmured into her hair. "Understood?"

"Understood," she whispered.

Outside, the storm raged on. But inside, Chase finally let herself cry, without fighting back the tears—not from the pain, but from the relief of forgiveness, and the quiet promise to do better.

When he finally pulled away, he cupped her face in his hands, his eyes searching hers. "Promise me you'll think before you act next time," he said. "Promise me you'll be more careful."

"I promise," she whispered, her voice trembling.

Satisfied, Thomas patted her bottom, a silent gesture to send her to her room. "Good. Now go dry off and get some rest. We'll talk more in the morning."

Chase nodded, wiping her tears as she turned to leave the room. As she climbed the stairs to her bedroom, she couldn't help but feel a strange sense of relief. The storm outside was still raging, but inside, the tension had lifted. She had faced the consequences of her actions, and in doing so, she had found a measure of peace.

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Chase shut the bedroom door behind her with a soft click, the weight of the evening still pressing heavily on her shoulders. The storm outside had quieted to a steady drizzle, the occasional rumble of distant thunder the only reminder of its earlier fury.

She crossed the room to the old, oval mirror propped against the wall—the one with the chipped wooden frame that had once belonged to her mother. For a moment, she hesitated, then turned her back to the glass and glanced over her shoulder, lowering her denim overalls to inspect the damage.

Her cheeks flushed as she took in the sight. Even through her thin, white underpants, the evidence of her father's discipline was clear—a warm, rosy hue that would no doubt linger for a while. She gingerly touched the tender skin, wincing slightly at the contact. It wasn't unbearable, but it was enough to make sitting down an uncomfortable prospect.

A sigh escaped her lips as she turned back around, seating herself on the edge of her bed. With a wince, she lifted herself up, gingerly, then spun around to lie on her stomach, sinking her face into a pillow. The events of the day replayed in her mind like scenes from a cautionary tale: the reckless thrill of taking the horse out in the storm, the fear in her father's eyes when he found her, the stern lecture, and finally—the consequence.

She had been foolish. She knew better.

Her gaze drifted to the small wooden cross hanging above her bed, its polished surface catching the dim glow of the oil lamp. Clara clasped her hands together, bowing her head.

"Dear Lord," she whispered, "thank You for watching over me today, even when I wasn't being very smart. And... thank You for giving me a Dad who cares enough to spank me."

Her throat tightened. She hadn't always appreciated his firm hand—there had been plenty of times she'd grumbled about his rules, his lectures, his punishments. But tonight, for the first time, she truly understood. He hadn't disciplined her out of anger. He had done it because he loved her. Because he wanted her safe.

"Help me to be wiser," she continued softly. "And help me to remember how much I'm loved."

A gentle knock at the door startled her.

"Chase?" Her father's voice was quiet, hesitant. "Can I come in?"

She quickly wiped her eyes. "Y-yes, sir."

The door creaked open, and Thomas stepped inside, his broad frame filling the doorway. He held a small tin in one hand—the salve he kept for saddle sores and minor burns.

"Thought you might need this," he said, setting it on her bedside table. His eyes were kind, the earlier sternness softened into something warmer. "You alright?"

Chase nodded, offering him a small, wobbly smile. "Yeah. Just... thinking."

Thomas sat beside her, the mattress dipping slightly under his weight. He didn't speak right away, just rested a hand on her shoulder, his calloused fingers giving a reassuring squeeze.

"You're a good girl, Chase," he said finally. "But even good girls need reminding sometimes."

She leaned into him, resting her head against his arm. "I know. And... I'm glad you do."

He chuckled softly, pressing a kiss to the top of her head. "Get some rest. Tomorrow's a new day."

As he left, closing the door gently behind him, Chase reached for the salve, her heart lighter than it had been all evening. The storm had passed—both outside and within her.

And for the first time in a long time, she felt truly, deeply *safe*.

The End

[Note: the first draft of this story was written in a chatlog with an AI chatbot before I quit using AI. I edited it and made additions.]